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# Daniel O'Connell and India

Pauline COLLOMBIER-LAKEMAN

Université de Strasbourg

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## Abstract

Even though O'Connell came from a Gaelic background and is well-known for this struggle in favour of the Emancipation of Irish Catholics and the Repeal of the 1800 Act of Union between Ireland and Great Britain, he also took part in other struggles such as the abolition of slavery. He also developed an interest for India. This paper wishes to examine how the Irish leader took part in the debates on the 1833 parliamentary Bill, which renewed the Charter of the East India Company and in the campaigns led in 1839 and 1840 by two associations – the *British India Society* et the *Northern Central British India Society*. It will try to determine if there were links between O'Connell's campaigns against British rule in India and against the 1800 Act of Union, which should lead to a discussion and assessment of O'Connell's attitude towards the British Empire.

Keywords: O'Connell, empire, East India Company, anti-imperialism, British India Society, Northern Central British India Society.

## Résumé

*Bien que d'origine gaélique et connu pour son combat pour l'émancipation des Catholiques irlandais et pour l'abrogation de la loi de 1800 rattachant l'Irlande à la Grande-Bretagne, O'Connell s'est aussi engagé dans d'autres combats comme l'abolition de l'esclavage. Il s'est aussi intéressé au cas de l'Inde. Cet article se propose d'examiner la façon dont le chef de file irlandais participa aux débats renouvelant la charte de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales en 1833 ainsi qu'aux campagnes menées en 1839 et 1840 par deux associations: la British India Society et la Northern Central British India Society. Il s'agit d'établir si des liens peuvent être repérés entre le combat que O'Connell mena contre la façon dont l'Inde était administrée par la Grande-Bretagne via la Compagnie des Indes Orientales et celui qu'il entreprit pour dénoncer l'Union entre l'Irlande et la Grande-Bretagne. Ce faisant, on s'interroge plus largement sur l'attitude que O'Connell choisit d'adopter vis-à-vis de l'Empire britannique.*

*Mots clés : O'Connell, empire, Inde, Compagnie des Indes Orientales, anti-impérialisme, British India Society, Northern Central British India Society.*

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Historian Bernard Porter offers quite a critical view of Irish nationalists when he asserts that their focus was primarily on Ireland and Irish issues, because they “rarely looked further than their Irish noses” and “saw everything from the point

of view of the Anglo-Irish dispute<sup>1</sup>". This opinion is, to a certain extent, shared by Stephen Howe, who wrote that "[e]arly Irish nationalists hardly ever identified their situation or case with that of other, non-European subject peoples in the British Empire or beyond<sup>2</sup>". But was this really the case? Howe himself does acknowledge that several leading Irish nationalists "adopt[ed] more generous internationalist attitudes" and gives the examples of Daniel O'Connell, Charles Stewart Parnell and Frank Hugh O'Donnell<sup>3</sup>.

Daniel O'Connell does appear to be a good example of the way an Irish politician could reconcile nationalist aspirations and humane concerns for broader reforms. As is well known, O'Connell came from a Gaelic-speaking family of Munster, and even though he did not advocate the use of the Gaelic language for the Irish population<sup>4</sup>, he seems to have been deeply attached to his native Kerry roots<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, as a Radical member of the British Parliament elected back in 1828, he expressed concern for the fate of Jews in the United Kingdom<sup>6</sup>, took an active part in the campaign for the abolition of slavery<sup>7</sup> and even denounced the fate of the Aborigenes and the Maoris in the Antipodes<sup>8</sup>.

1. B. Porter, *Critics of Empire: British radical attitudes to colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914*, London, Macmillan & Co., 1968, p. 312.
2. S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 43. See also Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006 & L. Colantonio, "L'Irlande, les Irlandais et l'Empire à l'époque de l'Union (1801-1921)", *Histoire@Politique*, n° 14 (May-August 2011), [<http://www.histoire-politique.fr/>] (consulted on 13 November 2012).
3. S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 45-6 & 48, in particular 45.
4. O'Connell is notably reported to have said: "A diversity of tongues is no benefit; it was first imposed on mankind as a curse, at the building of Babel. It would be of vast advantage to mankind if all the inhabitants spoke the same language. Therefore, although the Irish language is connected with many recollections that twine around the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of the English tongue, as the medium of modern communication, is so great, that I can witness without a sigh the gradual disuse of the Irish." (W. J. O'Neill Daunt, *Personal recollections of the late Daniel O'Connell*, M. P., London, Chapman & Hall, 1848, vol. I, p. 14-5).
5. Nationalists in the late nineteenth century such as Douglas Hyde, D. P. Moran and Daniel Corkery sharply criticized O'Connell for being what they called a "West Briton" and regarded him as responsible of the decline of the Gaelic Language (D. Corkery, *The Fortunes of the Irish Language*, Dublin, C. J. Fallon for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, 1954, p. 112-114; D. P. Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*, Dublin, J. Duffy, 1905 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 43 & B. Ó Conaire, *Language, Lore and Lyrics, Essays and Lectures of Douglas Hyde*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1986, p. 158). However, the more recent study by J. Murphy offers a more positive view on O'Connell's attitude towards his Gaelic roots (J. A. Murphy, "Daniel O'Connell and the Gaelic world", in M. O'Connell & K. B. Nowlan (eds.), *Daniel O'Connell, Portrait of a Radical*, Belfast, Appletree Press, 1984, p. 2-52, in particular 33-4, 36-7).
6. See his letter to Isaac L. Goldsmid, 11 September 1829, in M. O'Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, Dublin, Irish University Press for the Irish Manuscript Commission, 1972-1980, vol. IV, n° 1604, p. 95-7 and *Parliamentary Debates*, new series, vol. 30, col. 793-6 (17 May 1830).
7. The most recent academic works on the subject include: Ch. Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and The Anti-Slavery Movement: The Saddest Peoples the Sun Sees*, London, Pickering & Chatto, 2011 & Bruce Nelson, "'Come out of Such a Land, You Irishmen': Daniel O'Connell, American Slavery, and the Making of the 'Irish Race'", *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 42, n° 1 & 2 (Spring-Summer 2007), p. 58-81.
8. *The Liberator*, 7 August 1840 quoted by G. Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants and Romantic Nationalism", *American Historical Review*, vol. 80, n° 4 (October 1975) p. 893: "Misery, crime, and devastation – the

What is less known and has not been studied thoroughly up to now is the fact that O'Connell's interest in broader issues included British policy in India<sup>9</sup>. That O'Connell dealt with India is not surprising for at least two reasons: first, a fairly important number of Irish people were involved in the conquest of India, notably as soldiers, civil servants and missionaries<sup>10</sup>; secondly, parallels between Ireland and India were a feature of Irish political discourse in the 1830s and 1840<sup>11</sup>.

O'Connell first took part in the debates on the Bill of 1833, which renewed the Charter of the East India Company; he also participated in the agitation campaigns led by the British India Society and the Northern Central British India Society between 1838 and 1840. As we examine O'Connell's words on India on these occasions, we will try and show to what extent he contemplated parallels between the respective situations of Ireland and India in order to better denounce Britain as a colonial oppressor. How far did O'Connell's criticism of the excesses of British imperial policy go?

The fate of British India, and more particularly of the East India Company<sup>12</sup>, was discussed by the British Parliament in 1833. An Act had already been passed in 1813 curtailing some of the powers of the Company<sup>13</sup>. The Charter Bill voted in 1833 renewed the authorisation granted to the Company to administer the Indian territories for a further twenty years. However the Company was asked to abandon trade in India and lost its commercial monopoly in China and its tea monopoly in India. Europeans were no longer subject to restrictions to emigrate into India and were allowed to buy land and property. British administrative and political control of India was enhanced: the Governor General of Bengal

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obliteration of aboriginal inhabitants by 'Civilized Man' – were inevitable concomitants of Western colonialism, O'Connell told the members of the Aborigines Protection Society. He considered these among the greatest crimes of mankind and cited examples from settlements in the East Indies, Van Diemen's Island (Tasmania), and New Zealand. Colonialism and oppression went hand in hand, O'Connell argued, and he insisted that 'no other human event led to evils so multitudinous.'

9. However, O'Connell's name, words and role are mentioned in one article by S. R. Mehrotra: "The British India Society and its Bengal Branch, 1839-1846", *Indian Economic Social History Review*, vol. 4, n° 2 (1967), p. 131-54.

10. See A. Bielenberg, "Irish emigration to the British Empire", in A. Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, Harlow/New York, Longman, 2000, p. 215-34, notably 223. See also Th. Bartlett, "The Irish Soldier in India, 1750-1947", in M. & D. Holmes (eds.), *Ireland and India: Connections, Comparisons, Contrasts*, Dublin, Folens, 1997, 12-26; D. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer*, Belfast, the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1993, p. 145 & 147 & E. M. Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement: A Historical Survey, 1830-1980*, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1990.

11. Seán Ryder, "Ireland, India and popular nationalism in the early nineteenth century", in Tadhg Foley & Maureen O'Connor (eds.), *Ireland and India: Colonies, Culture and Empire*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2006, p. 12-25.

12. The East India Company was originally a group of merchants who, on 31 December 1600, were granted by royal charter the monopoly of all trade with the East Indies. Eventually, the company came to take control of large areas of the Indian territory as it came to exercise military power and take administrative functions. In other words, the Company exercised imperial control over India.

13. One of the provisions of the Act suppressed the trade monopoly the East India Company enjoyed in India except for tea and trade with China.

was appointed Governor General of India; together with an Executive Council, he had now extended powers to supervise the military and civil interests of the Company, to raise all revenues, and to control and legislate for Bengal as well as Bombay, Madras, and other territories possessed by the Company. In addition, the British Parliament was declared the supreme authority in India, with the right to both vote and repeal laws regarding British territories in India. Other provisions in the Charter Act specified that there should be no discrimination made between the Indians and the British by reason of descent, place of birth, race or colour, so that all could take part in the administration of the British Indian territories. The Governor General was also required to take measures to improve the condition of slaves and ultimately encourage the abolition of slavery in India.

As he stated during the debates, O'Connell generally approved of the government's intention to further control the East India Company. He actually welcomed the 1833 Charter Bill as a means of introducing civilisation into India, as opposed to the existing chaos created by the rule of the East India Company – it was according to him “the first great Charter in India, [...] the basis of a new order of things, after centuries of misrule, cruelty, and ignorance, and [...] the means of the gradual introduction into that part of the world of manufactures, the arts, science, and literature<sup>14</sup>”. However, he had several objections, notably “giving a further twenty years’ lease of India to the East-India Company”. He also questioned the company’s monopoly in salt and opium and denounced the “the abuses incidental to the existing system of titles to landed property in India<sup>15</sup>”.

In a letter he later addressed to his constituents, O'Connell complained again about the fact that the new Act “[did] not go to the root of the evil [and did] little indeed to ameliorate the state of the natives”. He strongly opposed “the vicious and atrocious conduct of the East India Company towards the natives” and “the grinding and desolating effect of what is called ‘the land revenue’” which he regarded as “a system of monstrous and perfect oppression”. As he denounced how inefficient the new law would be to “remedy the evils of uncertain tenures, rack rents, absenteeism, or exacting or oppressive agency”, it seems highly likely that he also had in mind his own native land which, at the time, faced the same issues. Four years later, O'Connell was indeed to denounce absenteeism in Ireland in a speech condemning the inadequacy of the Poor Law system:

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14. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, col. 1020 (19 July 1833).

15. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 19, col. 546 (10 July 1833). As a Roman Catholic who had been the champion of the emancipation of Catholics, O'Connell also opposed clauses of the new East India Charter which planned to increase the number of clergymen present in India as it meant in his understanding the “establishment of a state religion in India” and, more specifically, the “establishing one form of Christianity in India in preference to another.” *Ibid.*, vol. 19, col. 800 (17 July 1833) & col. 1019-21 (19 July 1833). The clause proposed to have “two bishops each with 2,500l., an arch-bishop with 5,000l. a-year, and three archdeacons with 300l. a-year”, instead of one bishop (that of Calcutta) and three archdeacons.

[...] I will implore you to go back to what is called the evidence of your forefathers; go back to the reigns of the Plantagenets and Tudors, when it was enacted that every man having an estate in Ireland, and not living half the year there, should be liable to a fine of 6s. 8d. in the pound on the gross amount of his rent-roll. Come out with an absentee law, and give me 6s 8d. in the pound on the rent-roll of all absentees. This may be called a dream; yet, after all, I believe it would give more permanent and more substantial relief to the poor of Ireland than your proposed Poor Laws. I know full well that some political economists have talked of absenteeism as not being a mischief to Ireland; but the doctrines of those men are now, I believe, derided by all<sup>16</sup>.

In the letter to his constituents of 1833, O'Connell even drew a clear parallel between the respective histories of India and Ireland, when he analysed how they had been conquered and dominated by the British:

There is [a] strange coincidence between the history of India and the sad story of Ireland. The subjugation of the former was only the enactment on a broader scale of the system of rapacity and deception by which the latter was subjugated. The support given by the English to the weaker O'Donnell in order to put down his more formidable competitor O'Neill, has been one thousand times imitated in India<sup>17</sup>.

Thanks to a particularly interesting use of discourse, the Irish leader combined echoes (*history/ story; subjugation/subjugated*) and comparative forms (*broader, weaker, more formidable*) in order to reinforce the idea that British policy in Ireland was a precursor for British policy in India; at the same time, oppositions (*support/put down; weaker/more formidable*), specific grammatical forms suggesting passivity (*the subjugation of the former; subjugated*) and hyperbolic terms or phrases (*rapacity, one thousand times*) convey the idea that British authorities were, in both cases, oppressive and full of duplicity.

However while O'Connell rejected the exploitative methods of East India Company rule, he did not go as far as to seriously put into question the ameliorative potential of the British Empire over the indigenous populations of India: according to him, "[t]he situation of the native inhabitants of India [was] deplorable, and yet it ha[d] been much improved by the conquest or acquisitions of the

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16. Daniel O'Connell, speech from April 28, 1837, "originally quoted" in M. F. Cusack, *The Speeches and Public Letters of the Liberator*, op. cit., vol. 1, read on the website of the Gilder Lerhman Center for the Study of Slavery, Abolition & Resistance, Yale University, [<http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/891.htm>], (26 June 2012).

17. D. O'Connell, "Second Letter to his Constituents", 8 October 1833, in M. F. Cusack, *The Speeches and Public Letters of the Liberator*, Dublin, McGlashan & Gill, 1875, vol. II, p. 421-2.

British<sup>18</sup>". In other words, the Bill, however faulty and imperfect it was, represented a "step in the march of civilisation".

The debates surrounding the Charter Bill of 1833 were not the first time O'Connell had expressed strong views about the situation in British India. Already in 1831, the Irish leader had supported a petition presented by Charles Forbes asking for the possibility for native Indians to serve on grand juries and for the introduction of trial by jury. His speech showed remarkable humane concern for the fate of the natives who, to his mind, were to be treated as equals and rejected the idea of colonisation:

There should be fixity given to the tenure of lands; the natives should be allowed to hold their lands at a moderate and fixed payment, so moderate as to enable them to meet the years of depression by the surplus produced by years of plenty. In short, they should have a permanent and beneficial interest in the lands of their native country. And the comfort of the natives should be regarded infinitely beyond the increase of the revenue of the India Company. The fatal mistake in India is to consider the natives merely as contributors to the advantages of the East India Company, instead of looking to the prosperity and happiness of our fellow subjects, the native population, as the great, the wise, the only object of our government of their country. Their country is really theirs, not ours, and we are criminal in not considering their interests and indefeasible rights as the paramount object of our solicitude<sup>19</sup>.

The passing of the Charter Bill did not mark the end of O'Connell's interest in the Indian question. As was seen previously, O'Connell was disappointed by the Act and thus shared the views of many of his fellow radical colleagues in Britain, for whom, as S.R Mehrotra reminds us, "the Charter Act of 1833 [...] had done no more than 'clip the wings of the chartered monopolists of India'". The end of the 1830s witnessed renewed interest in the cause of India because of a range of factors both in India and Britain. First the North Western Indian provinces were struck by a terrible famine in 1837-1838, which aroused the sympathy of philanthropist societies – notably the Aborigines Protection Society in

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18. D. O'Connell, "Second Letter to his Constituents", 8 October 1833, in M. F. Cusack, *The Speeches and Public Letters of the Liberator*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 419-25, in particular 420. A passage on p. 425 offers a similar mixed view of the Bill: "The great defect of the East India Bill is, that it has done nothing directly, and but very little by indirect operation to remedy the evils of uncertain tenures, rack rents, absenteeism, or exacting or oppressive agency. In short, the interests, the comfort, or the prosperity of the people of India have been but little consulted; and yet, with all its defects, the Bill composes one step in the march of civilisation."

19. Extract from a corrected speech by D. O'Connell, as printed in the *Mirror of Parliament* and reproduced in a memorandum from Sir Charles Forbes to Joseph Pease, quoted in J. H. Bell, *British Folks and British India Fifty Years Ago: Joseph Pease and his contemporaries*, London/Manchester, John Heywood, 1891, p. 24.



England. Secondly, issues that were interrelated with the fate of India, such as the promotion of free trade and the abolition of slavery, came to the forefront of the political debate in Britain:

Having secured the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, British philanthropy directed its attention to India where a different kind of slavery prevailed and a nefarious 'coolie trade' was growing. The emancipationists in Britain looked upon Indian [*sic*] not only as a new client but also as a new ally: she could, by producing more cotton; end the dependency of British manufacturers on American slave-grown cotton and thereby strike a blow at the institution of slavery in the United States of America<sup>20</sup>.

O'Connell expressed concern for the fate of India in August 1838, during the celebrations organised in Birmingham to rejoice about the abolition of negro apprenticeship. At the public meeting in the town hall, the Irish leader, who himself had been very deeply involved in the campaign in favour of the abolition of slavery in the 1820s and early 1830s, proposed the extension of the campaign against slavery to British India, which he portrayed as the victim of a long list of intolerable wrongdoings and sufferings:

It is not alone the slavery of two millions of human beings, but of the hundred millions of human beings who now suffer the degrading slavery of having no title to their land – no right to their houses – no species of permanent property – because the maladministration of the British Government in India has left them beggars in their native land. When the last despatches came away people were perishing, by the hundred of thousands, by famine; streams were polluted with their carcasses; the air was infected by corruption; famine stalked through a land which, but for tyranny and misrule, would be fertile and abundant<sup>21</sup>.

The renewed interest in India led in 1839 to the creation of the London-based British India Society, in which Daniel O'Connell took part, together with fellow British radicals and emancipationists such as Joseph Pease and George Thompson<sup>22</sup>. This new association aimed at denouncing the crimes and abuses commit-

20. S. R. Mehrotra, "The British India Society and its Bengal Branch, 1839-1846", art. cit., p. 131-2. The "coolie trade" Mehrotra refers to involved hired or contract labourers often of Chinese origin, who were used in India, and faced very poor working and living conditions.

21. J. H. Bell, *British Folks and British India Fifty Years Ago*, op. cit., p. 23. O'Connell became involved in the anti-slavery movement in 1824 and joined for instance the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (see footnote 7 for references on the subject).

22. Other known members included author and philanthropist William Howitt, the emancipationist Thomas Clarkson and British figures with strong interests in India such as Sir Charles Forbes, Robert Montgomery Martin and Major General John Briggs. The society was created after a provisional committee was set up on



ted by the East India Company and improving the lot of the native Indians<sup>23</sup>. During the Society's first public meeting on 6 July 1839, he was amongst the keynote speakers and helped introduce the resolutions passed by the Society. While broadly asking for "justice for India", he indicated that "India, with her teeming and peaceful population, cried loudly for the assistance of [Britain]", and harshly criticized British policy in the East:

All our eastern acquisitions were made by violence, treachery, and bloodshed. [...] If the people of this country only knew the oppressions and injustice done in India, it would cause a thrill of horror to pass from one end of the land to the other; and our policy to the native of the East was injudicious as it was tyrannical and oppressive [...] <sup>24</sup>.

Reports of the speeches of 1838 and 1839 do not contain any explicit comparison between India and Ireland. However, O'Connell's negative view of the consequences of the British presence in India unmistakably echoes of his public utterances against the Union existing between Great Britain and his native land. The metaphor of slavery was for instance also used by O'Connell to refer to the Irish political situation, which he denounced as a "Union between the master and the slave – between the oppressor and the oppressed<sup>25</sup>", based on "relations [...] [no] other than that of master and servant, shark and prey<sup>26</sup>". The same negative words (*treachery*, *bloodshed*) and similar hyperboles and accumulations were also resorted to in his many denunciations of Ireland's subjugation to British rule from 1800 onwards. This is especially evident in his speeches to the House of Commons in 1834, when he asked for a Repeal of the Union:

He had no hesitation in declaring, that if an inquiry were granted him, he had materials to show, that there never had been committed before such enormities as those by which the Union was brought about. [...] [A]nd that the chief means by which that act was consummated were intimidation, bribery, corruption, treachery and bloodshed. [...] There is not a single part of the Union compact that does not show how fraudulent it was. It was atrocious and criminal in its details as in its

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27 March 1839 and some preliminary agitation campaigns had taken place (*ibid.*, p. 132). The Society was quickly successful, at least for the first few months: lectures and branch societies were organised, including in Dublin (J. H. Bell, *British Folks and British India Fifty Years Ago*, *op. cit.*, p. 86, 139 & 143).

23. See *ibid.*, p. 12-24 & 58-60. See also T. G. Fraser, "Ireland and India", in K. Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire?', Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996, p. 77-93, in particular p. 85.

24. *The Times*, 8 July 1839.

25. *Parl. Deb.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 22, col. 1145.

26. D. O'Connell in *A Full and Revised Report of the Three Days' Discussion in the Corporation of Dublin on the Repeal of the Union*, Dublin, John Levy, 1843, p. 44.

concoction – it was marked by malice, and in its enforcement stained with blood and tears<sup>27</sup>.

Once more in the speech to the British India Society of 1839, one may note that O'Connell was only demanding a “milder, and better, and juster system of government” which, to his mind, would “vastly increase the revenue which [Britain derived] from India<sup>28</sup>”; and the resolution he put forward during the meeting shows that, while he was staunchly critical of domination by force, recurrent famines and the cultivation of opium, he nonetheless approved of the establishment of beneficial trade exchanges for Britain under the control of British authorities and did not fundamentally question British imperialism:

[E]vils exist in a country of vast extent and great fertility, whose inhabitants are docile, intelligent, and industrious; whose ancient institutions might be made instrumental to good government – a country capable of supplying many of our demands for tropical produce, and the desire and capacity of whose population to receive the manufactures and stimulate the commerce of Great Britain would, under a just and enlightened rule, be incalculably developed<sup>29</sup>.

Despite some inner dissensions between its members<sup>30</sup>, the British India Society celebrated its first anniversary with a meeting on 6 July 1840 at the Freemason's Hall. O'Connell attended and delivered a speech, in which he denounced “a system of government productive of misery, injustice, and poverty to the inhabitants”, and more specifically the East India Company's “odious and most unjust monopoly of opium”, its interference in the collection and trade of salt, “the imperfection and corruption in the administration of police and justice”, the forfeiture of estates, the unfair tax system on the land and the recurrent famines. The speech climaxed in a dramatic denunciation of the British rule and a call for reforms and justice:

In the places under our rule there was the greatest amount of depravity and crime. We first rob[bed] the natives and then we starved them. That state of society had superinduced every degree of human wic-

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27. *Parl. Deb.*, 3rd series, vol. 22, cols. 1121 & 1141. Other instances in which O'Connell uses similar arguments and words are a speech at the Royal Exchange on 18 September 1810 (J. O'Connell (ed.), *The Select Speeches of Daniel O'Connell*, Dublin, J. Duffy, 1854, vol. I, p. 21), a letter to Bishop Doyle from 16 June 1831 (M. O'Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, n° 1820, p. 335 or his other parliamentary speech on 29 April 1834 (*Parl. Deb.*, vol. 23 ; cols. 277-279)

28. *The Times*, 8 July 1839.

29. *Ibid.*

30. See S. R. Mehrotra, “The British India Society and its Bengal Branch, 1839-1846”, *art. cit.*, p. 136-7: “Early in 1840 a serious difference of opinion developed amongst the members of its London Committee over the opium question. [...] These internal dissensions had already paralysed the activities of the London Committee.”

kedness. It was not uncommon for mothers even to drown their own children in the night to save them from the horrors of certain starvation in prospect. [...] By depriving the communities of their rights we have engendered crime, misery, and revolt, and every fresh inroad on the municipalities loosed our hold on the affections of the people, and hastened the downfall of our empire. All the evils he had mentioned might be avoided, and all the good accomplished with nothing but justice, nothing but humanity<sup>31</sup>.

This anniversary meeting was followed by another important gathering in Manchester on 26 August 1840 in order to establish the Northern Central British India Society. This new body was to supervise all the newly-created provincial British India Societies, and with its creation the agitation in favour of India shifted from London to Manchester. As one of the prominent members of the British India Society, O'Connell attended the meeting, which gave him a further opportunity to denounce how Britain administered India. More particularly the Irish leader criticised again how salt was collected without any being left for the use and benefit of the local population; he once more blamed Britain for encouraging the cultivation of opium while India could produce "cotton, rice, and indigo, in abundance" instead, and denounced the heavy land tax. He referred again to the many famines that had taken place in 1764-6, 1770, 1772-82, 1792, 1798, 1804, 1820, 1823, and then every year from 1833 to 1837: according to him, they were only the result of "a very bad system of government". And such misgovernment led to a totally paradoxical situation, in which "[t]he country was the most productive on the earth, it would bring forth three crops a year; but ruthless man had interfered and turned that heaven into a chaos of wretchedness, misery, and starvation<sup>32</sup>".

Interest in British India quickly subsided after that meeting. In 1841, the British India Society ended a formal alliance with the Anti-Corn Law League: agitation in favour of reform in India would cease until the corn laws were repealed, and then be revived with the support of the free traders. Such an alliance marked the end the British India Society for, once the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, it ceased to exist. O'Connell was favourable to the alliance with the Anti-Corn Law League as he explained to his friend and colleague Joseph Pease in a letter dated from 25 May 1841:

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31. *Freeman's Journal*, 9 July 1840.

32. D. O'Connell, speech at Manchester, 28 August 1840, *The Times*, 28 August 1840. See also *Proceedings of a public meeting for the formation of the Northern Central British India Society: held in the Corn Exchange, Manchester, on Wednesday evening, August 26th, 1840*, in Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection, Cornell University Library, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, [<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislavery;idno=05835922;view=image;seq=1>] (5 July 2011).

Above all things, we should unite as much as possible with the Anti-Corn Law League. Their objects and ours are identical – they are endeavouring to procure more food. On this point we and the Anti-Corn Law men are completely united. Again: the Anti-Corn Law League seeks to enlarge the markets for our manufactures – we seek to give our manufacturers the extensive and almost incalculably great markets of India, by enabling that people to purchase from us the articles of which they are now deprived, by reason, solely, of their poverty. We are thus united with the Anti-Corn Law League, in the desire to increase the sale of British-made goods. Why, then, we should unite with that body in our common cause<sup>33</sup>?

This last quote, just like others we presented before, leads us to wonder how to interpret O'Connell's interest for India. Did O'Connell act as an Irish nationalist, feeling empathy for another oppressed nation, or as a British radical, keen to protect British and Irish interests? The parallels that appear between the way the Irish leader described the fate of India and the situation of his native country suggest that he considered that British India and Ireland faced similar conditions of oppression and were entitled to a similar degree of freedom or autonomy. In that regard, O'Connell's views shared common points with the discourse of some of his fellow nationalists – Young Ireland figures such as Charles Gavan Duffy, Thomas Davis or even John Mitchel who, as Seán Ryder has shown, resorted to Indian-Irish analogies to support their anti-imperial stance<sup>34</sup>. Similarities can also be found between O'Connell's words and deeds and those of later Irish nationalists like Irish Parliamentary Party MPs Frank Hugh O'Donnell or Alfred Webb<sup>35</sup>.

At the same time, it is clear that O'Connell was not as radical as Thomas Davis or John Mitchel and he certainly did not go as far as later Irish nationalists

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33. Quoted in J. H. Bell, *British Folks and British India Fifty Years Ago*, *op. cit.*, p. 126-7.

34. Just like O'Connell, Gavan Duffy for instance compared Irish and Indian history: "The plunderers of India were as like the plunderers of Ireland as one horse-leech is like another; and Clive and Cromwell are brothers in crime [...] Our histories are almost counterparts of each other." (Ch. Gavan Duffy, "The Massacre of Cabul – India and Ireland", *The Belfast Vindicator*, 19 March 1842, 467, quoted by S. Ryder, "Ireland, India and popular nationalism in the early nineteenth century", *art. cit.*, p. 13).

35. Frank Hugh O'Donnell (1846-1916) developed quite an ambivalent discourse on the Empire. While he could denounce the British Empire as a veritable slave empire (*Parl. Deb.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 285, col. 1766), he also defined himself both as a "an Imperialist as well as a Nationalist" and dreamt of conciliating Empire and nations (F. Hugh O'Donnell, *A History of the Irish Parliamentary Party* [1910], London/Port Washington (New York), Kennikat Press, 1970, vol. II, p. 411 & 425). Similarly, while he never really put into question the British imperial domination in India, Alfred Webb (1834-1908) denounced excessive taxes introduced to fund the Indian Office's expenses or the introduction into India of heavy drinking and opium (A. Webb, "Political Address to the Tenth Indian National Congress", Madras, 26-29 décembre 1894, in A. M. Zaidi (ed.), *Congress Political Addresses, Vol. One : 1885-1900*, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1986, p. 199-200 & 205).

who took position in favour Indian political autonomy<sup>36</sup>. The Irish leader's discourse shows that he never totally opposed the idea of the British Empire, believed in the civilising mission of the Empire and embraced the ideals of the supporters of free trade<sup>37</sup>. The desire he expressed for a union between the British India Society and the Anti-Corn Law League notably betrays his commitment to both free trade and utilitarianism since he believed India offered "extensive and almost incalculably great markets" for British goods. His discourse thus suggests that his position was not purely nationalist; O'Connell actually viewed his role in broader terms. At the Freemasons' Hall meeting organised in July 1839 to set up the British India Society, the Irish leader concluded his speech by stating solemnly: "[...] from this moment I adopt the Natives of India as my clients<sup>38</sup>". He used again the image of the law in a letter dated from December 1839 and addressed to Joseph Pease:

Respected friend, – I wish to remind you of our clients – especially of your clients – the people of India. [...] The English people are careless respecting the Indians, especially by reasons of their ignorance of the real state of the unfortunate natives of the peninsula and of our territories there. They will never be roused until they are made to understand the misery the Indian people endure from our misgovernment. We have the strongest case that ever was handled by the advocates of humanity. [...] More than one hundred million of human beings are under our control. They have oppressors and plunderers in abundance. How few friends, how few disinterested advocates have they<sup>39</sup>?

O'Connell used this metaphor a third time, in the speech he gave a year later for the anniversary of the birth of the British India Society; he started his address by presenting himself as "the advocate of a hundred and fifty million of human beings, in India, who were treated worse than slaves, and rendered beggars by oppression<sup>40</sup>". Comparing the Indian natives to "clients" and the members of the British India Society to their "advocates" does not come as a surprise in

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36. See S. Ryder, "Ireland, India and popular nationalism in the early nineteenth century", art. cit. as well as Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-1964*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2008; Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre, *Cosmopolitan Nationalism in the Victorian Empire: Ireland, India and the Politics of Alfred Webb*, London, Basingstoke, 2009 & Michael Silvestri, *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory*, London, Basingstoke, 2009.

37. Interestingly enough, Seán Ryder notes that Irish-Indian analogies were also present in pro-imperialist Irish political discourse (S. Ryder, "Ireland, India and popular nationalism in the early nineteenth century", art. cit., p. 19-24)

38. *The Times*, 8 July 1839.

39. D. O'Connell to J. Pease, 13 December 1839, M. O'Connell (ed), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, op. cit., vol. VI, n° 2667, p. 290.

40. *Freeman's Journal*, 9 July 1840.

O'Connell's discourse since he had been trained as a lawyer. The phrase "advocates of humanity" also suggests that O'Connell viewed his role in broad terms and therefore helps corroborate what Seán Ryder has already observed about the Irish leader's criticism of British oppression in other countries:

O'Connell did also make reference to the dispossession and slaughter of the aboriginal people of Australia and New Zealand, attacking the imperial policies which had caused such an evil [...]. Yet this condemnation is not one which directly seeks solidarity or identification between the Irish and the Maori or aborigines: rather it is mobilising the critique of the improper conduct of empire by the British – highlighting the hypocritical chasm between their civilising ideals and their corrupt practices<sup>41</sup>.

In other words, it seems possible to regard O'Connell as sharing ideas with a group of thinkers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – those identified by Jennifer Pitts in her book *A Turn to Empire* who, like Edmund Burke or Jeremy Bentham, "drew on a strikingly wide range of ideas to criticize European conquests and rule over peoples across the globe: among others, the right of humanity and the injustice of foreign despotism, the economic wisdom of free trade and foolishness of conquest, the corruption of natural man by a degenerate civilization, the hypocrisy required for self-governing republics to rule over powerless and voiceless subjects, and the impossibility of sustaining freedom at home while exercising tyranny abroad<sup>42</sup>." It seems for instance that a connection can be established between O'Connell's views on India and Edmund Burke's. From the 1770s, long before O'Connell, Burke had been a "resolute critic of the East India Company<sup>43</sup>". Similarities can actually be found between the words of O'Connell and those of Burke since the latter denounced the system of British rule in India as "an Arbitrary system" and "a corrupt one", and criticised "Systematick [*sic*] iniquity and oppression<sup>44</sup>". Long before O'Connell, Burke had noted the British people's ignorance of and lack of sympathy for the fate of the Indian people and had resorted to strong language and emphasis to arouse sympathy<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, Pitts underlines Burke's ambivalence and the limits to

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41. S. Ryder, "Defining Colony and Empire in Early Nineteenth Century Nationalism", in T. McDonough (ed.) *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2005, p. 165-85, in particular 180.

42. J. Pitts, *A Turn To Empire, The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 1.

43. J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

44. Quoted by J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 65-66.

45. For instance, Pitts gives a quote from 1783 that echoes strangely with O'Connell's own words decades later. Burke then said "[W]e are in general, Sir, so little acquainted with Indian details; the instruments of oppression under which the people suffer are so hard to be understood; and even the very names of the sufferers are so uncouth and strange to our ears, that it is very difficult for our sympathy to fix upon these objects", which

his critical stance on British rule in India for he “continued to press for reforms rather than simply to call for ending British rule in India altogether<sup>46</sup>”. Similarly, parallels could also be made between O’Connell’s views and Jeremy Bentham’s. Bentham suggested the possibility of setting up jury trials in India in his *Principles of Judicial Procedure* published after his death while O’Connell had supported the same idea in 1831<sup>47</sup>. Bentham was also ambiguous when dealing with the issue of the end of colonial rule in India, even though he should be regarded as “a participant in the late eighteenth-century movement toward scepticism of imperial conquests and aspirations than [...] as a protocolonialist [...]”<sup>48</sup>.

Similarly, O’Connell cannot be defined as a “protocolonialist”; he belonged instead to two movements with similar concerns. As an Irish nationalist, he can be regarded as belonging to a trend within Irish nationalism, which expressed the belief that Irish nationalists could serve as well as be inspired by other causes and aspirations for autonomy in the rest of the British Empire. As a British Liberal and even a Radical, he also fitted within a broader movement rooted in the eighteenth century and committed to challenge imperial ventures which went against principles such as freedom and justice.

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reminds us of what O’Connell wrote to Joseph Pease in 1839: “The English people are careless respecting the Indians, especially by reasons of their ignorance of the real state of the unfortunate natives of the peninsula and of our territories there. They will never be roused until they are made to understand the misery the Indian people endure from our misgovernment.” (D. O’Connell to J. Pease, 13 December 1839, M. O’Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O’Connell*, *op. cit.*, vol. VI, n° 2667, p. 290).

46. J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 69-70.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

48. J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 113 & 121. For the relationship between O’Connell and Bentham, see for instance J. E. Crimmins, “Jeremy Bentham and Daniel O’Connell: their Correspondence and Radical Alliance, 1828-31”, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 40, n° 2 (1997), p. 359-387.